

# Theme of transformative nature of love in sonnets from the portuguese and the gre...

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Texts are cultural snapshots representing their era - they reflect and develop the values, ideas and attitudes of their context. Two texts, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's (EBB) suite of Petrarchan form sonnet's "Sonnets from the Portuguese" and F. Scott Fitzgerald's modernist novel "The Great Gatsby" explore the transformative nature of love and also the desire of an individual for a transcendental love. Both authors draw on their own interpretations of love and infuse the context of their time to help represent these values of love to the responder. It is from these different interpretations that an in depth comparative study can insight the responder about the notions of love and how they have impacted on our contemporary society.

EBB is able to display the transformative nature of love through the contrast in her sonnets throughout her suite. The contrast is seen between Sonnet I, where love is indecisive and unknown, and the penultimate Sonnet XLIII which proclaims a female declaration of love demonstrating the transformative nature of love as the persona accepts love, reasoning its capacity through the dialectical nature of the Petrarchan sonnet form. The unexpected nature of love is shown in Sonnet I in the comparison between the intertextual reference to the Greek Pastoral poet, "how Theocritus had sung of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years", contrasted against her earlier life as seen in the octave, "I saw, in gradual vision through my tears, the sweet, sad years, the melancholy years". The personification of love, "a mystic shape" which "from behind... drew me backward by the hair", in the sestet, demonstrates the full power that love had over EBB. In the final couplet, the assurance that it was "Not death, but Love" that had come for her is an unexpected relief to an invalid in her 40s. By Sonnet XLIII,

the persona is completely resolute in her love exclaimed through the anaphora, “ I love thee to the depth and breadth and height... I love thee to the level of everyday’s... I love thee freely... I love thee purely... I love thee with a passion”. Her exclamation completes the contrast that the responder sees throughout the suite and demonstrates how EBB was able to capture a mutual experience of love. EBB’s Victorian era context has a demonstrative impact on the transformative nature of love as this subverts and contradicts the traditional way of love in her society.

Similarly, Fitzgerald is able to express the transformative nature of love in “ The Great Gatsby” through the characterisation of Jay Gatsby. The 1920’s Jazz Age was filled with prosperity and wealth, where the American Dream played a huge role in sculpting people’s lives. Fitzgerald uses the narration of Nick, the unreliable narrator who embodies the voice of the novel, to describe Gatsby as a “ Penniless man without a past” engaging in characterisation to highlight how the American Dream allows Gatsby to believe that he could achieve anything, his past excluded. Gatsby always had the aspiration to achieve the American Dream, highlighted through his father’s dialogue, “ He knew he had a big future in front of him”. However, Gatsby’s flaw of naïve idealism expressed through his reassurance to Nick that you, “ can’t repeat the past? Why of course you can!” reinforces how Gatsby fell in love with a false dream that he had envisioned those five years ago, transforming his whole life in a façade of expectation, “ he wanted to recover something, perhaps some part of him that had gone into loving Daisy. ” Gatsby’s transformation, through his pursuit of love, became caught

up within the corrupted material world with which he lived in and led him ultimately onto the path of death as opposed to EBB who cared more about the purity of love that she shared leading to the path of life.

The comparison between Fitzgerald's and EBB's two texts effectively demonstrates the impact that context can have on the transformative nature of love. EBB is able to demonstrate how an individual can be overwhelmed by their desire for a transcendental love through sonnet XXII of her suite, rejecting this desire by the end of the sonnet for a more worldly, material and ultimately human love. The repetition of the inexpressible experience of 'silence' throughout the sonnet: "Face to face, silent', '... our deep dear silence" is used to highlight the preciousness of her love, as she compares it to that of a spiritual realm. EBB subverts the traditional gender codes by adopting a female voice to assert her authority in her concern that "angels would... drop some golden orb of perfect song into our deep, dear silence." Using imagery of the perfection of their love she conveys at this point the intrusiveness of that notion. Her reasoning at the Volta states, "Let us stay rather on Earth", preferring a physical, mortal love. EBB's desire for a transcendental love was rejected, a perspective that those of the Victorian Era (and 1920s) failed to foresee. She preferred a more authentic, pure experience culminating in her decision to elope to Italy against the wishes of her father, further subverting gender roles within her context and in doing so creating an appreciation from a contemporary responder.

Similarly, Fitzgerald is also able to demonstrate in "The Great Gatsby" how individuals can be consumed by their desire for a transcendental connection,

through Gatsby's fixation on the "orgastic future". Fitzgerald uses symbolism of the "green light" to showcase the idea of Gatsby's unattainable, transcendental love that he desired. The green light lay at the end of Daisy's dock across the bay. Fitzgerald encompasses an imagery of yearning, "he stretched out his arms toward the dark water... I could have sworn he was trembling" to demonstrate that it is just beyond the grasp of Gatsby. The reinforcement of Gatsby's belief that he could achieve his dream comes at the end of the novel "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us", highlighting how consumed Gatsby had become for his transcendental love unlike EBB, who realized that a more authentic pure love should be desired. Fitzgerald in doing so is able to highlight the major flaw of his society, as Gatsby fails to understand that the American Dream is just a dream, expressing the tragic consequences of a neglectful and hedonistic society during the 1920s leading to the great depression that occurred a decade later. The egocentric context in which Fitzgerald lived in impacted upon his text's values drastically, creating an appreciation from a contemporary responder today.

Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's suite of Petrarchan form sonnets "Sonnets from the Portuguese" and F. Scott Fitzgerald's modernist novel "The Great Gatsby" are able to display the authors perspectives on the transformative nature of love which in turn is also able to demonstrate to the responder, then and now, how individuals can become consumed by the desire for a transcendental love. Looking at these two texts from the lens of a contemporary responder through a comparative study, allows the values of

love that both authors are trying to convey to stimulate the responder into questioning how the intertextual perspectives of both texts, utilizing the impact of their contexts, have shaped the society in which we live today.